



Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council (OLWMC)

January 21, 2025- Director's Summary

Watershed Rules and Regulations

Project Review:

The Watershed Rules and Regulations (WRR) Workgroup was a state-local partnership consisting of representatives from five New York State agencies, as well as members of a technical local workgroup representing the Owasco Lake Watershed, including members from: Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council (OLWMC); Town of Owasco; City of Auburn; and Cayuga County. The Workgroup was formed in response to the submission of proposed revisions to the 1984 Watershed Rules and Regulations (Part 104.1- City of Auburn and Town of Owasco) to the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) in December 2020. NYSDOH project updates are posted on the OLWMC's website (<https://www.olwmc.org/projects>).

The NYSDOH has indicated that it does not have the authority from the legislature to create nutrient management regulations for the Owasco Lake watershed. Specifically, the NYSDOH indicated that when the Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) program was established, nutrient management on farms became the sole responsibility of the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYSDAM).

The City of Auburn, Town of Owasco, and Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA) filed an Article 78 petition with NYS, seeking to clarify whether the NYSDOH has the right to regulate nutrient management practices under updated Owasco Lake Watershed Rules and Regulations. Article 78 is a petition that challenges the actions of administrative agencies and other government bodies. The lawsuit contends that the laws cited do not firmly establish that the NYSDAM's authority concerning nutrient management supersedes the NYSDOH's responsibility to promulgate regulations for the protection of public health.

On July 22, 2024, the New York State Department of Health, Bureau of Water Supply Protection notified the City of Auburn and Town of Owasco that the Department does not intend to move forward with amendments to 10 NYCRR Part 104.1 City of Auburn and Town of Owasco Watershed Rules and Regulations. According to their letter, "following internal evaluation of the existing regulations, the Department determined that amendments are not necessary to ensure potable water quality for the foreseeable future."

The City of Auburn, the Town of Owasco, and OWLA filed a new lawsuit on November 22, 2024 to help ensure that NYS Department of Health fulfills its duties for protecting NYS watersheds. The new Article 78 lawsuit responds to the NYS Department of Health's recent decision that new rules and regulations are not necessary to protect Owasco Lake drinking water, wherein New York

State failed to provide data or information to support its decision to terminate the rulemaking process. The new Article 78 petition filed in the Cayuga County Supreme Court challenges the Department's decision to deny the City of Auburn and Town of Owasco's request to regulate the Owasco Lake watershed for the expressed purpose of protecting Owasco Lake's water quality. Under NYS Public Health Law, the NYS Department of Health is responsible to support the advancement of watershed rules and regulations for the protection of water supplies.

Staff, Recognition, Awareness, Education and Outreach Project Updates

- Staff will give a talk regarding the OLWMC's operations and initiatives at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry's 'Spring 2025 Water Science and Policy Seminar Series.'
- Staff are engaging with the Cato-Meridian Elementary School's Lego League Robotics team, designing a remote operated vehicle (ROV) to reduce plastic pollution in lakes, rivers, and oceans.
- Staff will be presenting at the March 8, 2025 Bob Brower scientific symposium, featuring topics including 9E implementation and OLWIPD roles and public services.

Nine Element Watershed Plan (9EP)

Project Review:

- Cayuga County received a New York State Department of State grant to implement a high priority recommendation from the 2016 Owasco Lake Watershed Management and Waterfront Revitalization Plan, which was to incorporate the EPA Nine Key Elements. This project was led by the Cayuga County Department of Planning and Economic Development and the consultant on the project was Ecologic, LLC. The Owasco Lake Watershed Nine Element Plan for Phosphorus Reduction (9EP) was approved by the New York State Department of State and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/water_pdf/owasco9e.pdf). This Clean Water Plan advances efforts to restore and protect the water quality of Owasco Lake and its watershed. The collaborative effort identified focused strategies to help ensure the lake water supply, aquatic habitat, and recreational uses are protected. The development of the plan focused on understanding and managing phosphorus and sediment inputs from the Owasco Lake watershed to provide for recommendations to drive watershed protection and remediation projects. In 2024, Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) scenarios were modeled for a 20% reduction in phosphorus loading to the lake to simulate the effects of expanded nutrient management Planning Tier 3 or equivalent, restricted applications of fertilizer and manure in areas that abut streams, and the implementation of cover crops. A MEANSS approach was used to estimate relocating septic systems within 100 feet of surface waters.
- The OLWMC is providing a coordination role for future projects and programming, according to the recommendations of the 9EP.

- The OLWMC’s 9E Project Coordination Committee (via Resolution 03-2022 at its November 15, 2022 public board meeting) prioritizes, coordinates, and facilitates project and programming implementation based on the recommendations of the 9EP. Partnering agencies and organizations convene on a semi-monthly basis to advance 9EP goals. As part of the group’s 2023 work plan, the Committee developed a phased approach towards preparing project proposals and fundraising for watershed streams inventorying and engineering planning in 2024 to direct stream restoration projects between 2024-2025, for funding tributary monitoring between 2024-2025, and for developing an Owasco Lake Watershed Agriculture Program (OLWAP) similar to what was created for the Skaneateles Lake watershed.
- The following grant proposal was submitted and funded in response to NYS grant program solicitations in the summer of 2023, and targets the highest phosphorus contributing landscape/acre within the Owasco Lake Watershed, as documented in the 9EP:
 1. The City of Auburn submitted a NYS non-point non-agricultural planning grant proposal to assess stream corridors including for Sucker and Veness Brooks, as well as other small tributaries within the prioritized Owasco Lake HUC 12 subwatershed at the northern end of the lake.
 - a. The City of Auburn’s NYS non-point non-agricultural planning grant proposal was awarded \$75,000.
 - b. The Finger Lakes Land Trust (FLLT), a member of the 9E Coordination Committee, will help leverage synergies between their recently NYS-awarded \$1,240,000 for Land Acquisition to Protect Owasco Lake, which targets protections of the Sucker Brook wetland, and the City of Auburn’s NYS-awarded \$75,000 for stream corridor assessments in the Owasco Lake HUC12 subwatershed, which includes Sucker Brook. Restored streambanks and wetland corridors are ranking criteria for FLLT while targeting land acquisitions to create protected preserves and easements.
 - c. The City of Auburn developed its grant contract with NYS.
 - d. The 9E committee is considering replicating this project for priority subwatersheds, understanding that stream corridor assessments will provide a pathway for funding related stream restoration projects.
- The 9E Coordination Committee is supporting capacity building for local organizations to provide the programming necessary for the watershed agricultural industry to advance best management practice (BMP) implementation at the rate recommended by the NYS approved 9EP. The Committee composed and submitted a proposal for NYS to fund the development of a focused OLWAP that would leverage the existing tiered Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) program. Committee members met with NYS Officials on January 25, 2024 to discuss official sponsorship of the proposed program under the NYS 2024 budget.
 - \$500,000 was included within the Senate one house budget for the 9E Coordination Committee’s proposed OLWAP.
 - Ultimately, the OLWAP was not funded within the 2024 NYS budget.
- The Committee updated the 9E Plan’s implementation checklist to track the status of associated programming and projects implementation.

Project Update

- The 9E Coordination Committee will be developing a 2023-2024 report to feature the 9EP projects and programs that have been advanced thus far.
- The committee continues to advance ongoing grant projects and programming and has scheduled its next meeting for January 22, 2025.

Watershed Lake and Tributary Monitoring

Projects Review:

- Doctorate Assistant Professors from SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF) provided processing and analyses in-kind for both tributary and lake data collected from recent years.
 - Two of the 2024 tributary sampling sites that were used to collect baseline data for the OLWMC's "Owasco Lake Watershed Critical Streams Restoration Project" (funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation – Sustain Our Great Lakes (SOGL) program) are scoped for sampling again in 2025 during project construction.
 - Associated topics of discussion have included the want to fund and install tributary flow monitoring sensors that track flow to generate nutrient proxy loading, as well as small weather stations to better constrain how localized storms drive nutrient inputs. The proposal would include the delivery of real-time data to the internet, as part of a long-term strategy for early warning capabilities for HAB-likely conditions. There is a National Science Foundation grant solicitation that should be opening soon, which may represent a potential collaboration.
 - SUNY ESF professors and students' topics of interest include characterizing the relationship between freshwater sponges and various water quality parameters in New York, including in the Finger Lakes Region. Their proposed project includes the determination of where the sponges currently exist, and the development of an outreach component to train community members on sponge identification for help with their search. OLWMC staff and OWLA volunteers are considering providing support for the research project on Owasco Lake.
- There have been growing concerns and community outreach regarding lake foam that collects on and near the shoreline this time of year. In partnership, the City of Auburn Municipal Utilities Department created a purchase order under professional services for a single lab analysis by Global Aquatic Research (GAR) to sample lake foam this year; GAR planned to perform specialized laboratory analysis of a single foam sample on Owasco Lake for emerging lake contaminants Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). GAR researchers planned to collect a foam sample on November 10, 2024. They started at the north end and found foam but not enough to get an adequate sample. They need 6-8 liters of foam volumetrically, which collapses into 600-800 milliliters of a water sample. The field team embarked on a second sampling trip on November 13, 2024 and again were unable to collect a sample.
 - GAR included Owasco, Seneca, Keuka, and Skaneateles Lakes within their Water Resources Institute grant submission. If they are awarded funding, they will be sampling in 2025, whereby one sampling trip to each lake is proposed, and GAR would quantify PFAS concentrations and a few water quality parameters in foam, the surface microlayer, and lake water. The overarching purpose is to understand how PFAS

partitions between these phases, which impacts both monitoring and routes of exposure. This will also establish a baseline that partners can build on in future work. A secondary project feature proposed would be to implement in Owasco Lake the foam reporting tool that was developed with the Canandaigua Lake Watershed Association ([Canandaigua Lake Foam Survey](#)). This will involve coordinating with and training citizen scientists to use the tool. After sampling and data collection is complete, a stakeholders meeting would be scheduled in Fall/Winter 2025-2026, and representatives from all four lakes (as well as Canandaigua Lake) would be included. The team would use this meeting to consider the impact of the project on management strategies, public outreach, and next steps. The OLWMC provided a letter of support for the collaborative grant proposal.

- The Cayuga County Planning Department drafted a data usability assessment report (DUAR) and final 2024 tributary monitoring project report for review among partners and submittal for further review and approval by the NYSDEC.

Owasco Lake Tributary Monitoring Project Update:

- The Cayuga County Planning Department developed its 2025 lake and watershed monitoring and implementation priorities in the context of annual Finger Lakes Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance (FOLLOWPA) funding. As in 2024, they will include monitoring, data management, and implementation projects for Owasco Lake and its watershed. FOLLOWPA funds in 2025 will be used for:
 - The installation and implementation of BMPs by SWCD
 - O&M for the USGS Owasco Inlet Gage
 - CSLAP for OWLA, Duck Lake Association and Lake Como Association
 - OWLA Tributary Sampling Program
 - Owasco Watershed Data Portal
 - Public outreach and education on invasive species and water quality
 - Aquatic vegetation harvesting
 - O&M of the boat cleaning station at Emerson Park
 - Support for the septic system inspection program

NYS-awarded Drinking Water Source Protection Program (DWSP2)

Project Review:

- Consultants for the City of Auburn's NYS-awarded Drinking Water Source Protection Program (DWSP2) worked with City of Auburn water resource managers and partners to identify potential sources of Owasco Lake water quality contamination and provide recommendations for resource protection. The DWSP2 committee reviewed and edited the draft plan. A refined draft of the City of Auburn's DWSP2 was delivered from the contracted consultant to the City of Auburn and circulated among the project committee. The City of Auburn approved of the plan. The local group awaits final plan approval from NYSDEC and NYSDOH to move forward on plan implementation and associated project(s) proposal(s) development. The Town of Owasco received consultant support through NYS to develop its DWSP2. The consultants involved in the project have finalized and delivered the Town's plan to NYS agencies for their review and approval. The local group awaits final plan approval from

NYSDEC and NYSDOH to move forward on plan implementation and associated project(s) proposal(s) development.

- Based on NYS's decision to terminate amendments to 10 NYCRR Part 104.1 City of Auburn and Town of Owasco Watershed Rules and Regulations, the amendments being a recommendation included within the draft City of Auburn DWSP2, that feature was removed from the plan, allowing the plan to move forward to completion. The project Community Advisory Group last met with project consultants on August 14, 2024 to review final details of the draft plan.
- At the tail end of 2024, the project Community Advisory Group made additional changes to the City of Auburn's DWSP2 for transmittal to, and approval by, NYS. Among other recent changes, the group is including the Owasco Lake Watershed Agricultural Program concept within the proposed plan for the prospect of NYS funding the farmer-driven program in coming years.

Project Update:

In December 2024, on behalf of the Town of Lansing, OLWMC staff reviewed and provided feedback regarding the Southern Cayuga Lake Intermunicipal Water Commission's draft DWSP2 for Bolton Point, leveraging experience with developing both the City of Auburn's and Town of Owasco's DWSP2s. Staff will engage with the Commission on January 23, 2025 to discuss suggestions that were made.

Municipal Codes and Ordinances

Project Review:

- Proposed erosion and sediment control ordinances concerning new construction activities were prepared for OLWMC directing municipalities for their independent board review and consideration for adoption.
 - The Village of Moravia adopted the Sediment and Erosion Control Plan, and associated Appendix E, prepared and proposed by the OLWMC for advancing municipal control requirements for new construction activities.
 - The Town of Fleming reviewed the proposed ordinances and concluded that they already have adequate protections in place concerning new construction activities as part of an existing overlay district.

Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) Identification and Programming:

Review:

- This year, HABs have been observed statewide, with many reports generated within the Finger Lakes Region. Climate change, nutrient pollution, and invasive species are considered important drivers for HABs development. Regional advocates, watershed organizations, and municipalities call for stricter regulations and enforcement of nutrient pollution entering the Finger Lakes. Governor Kathy Hochul recently committed an investment of 42 million dollars to the newly formed Eastern Finger Lakes Coalition of Districts to enhance Finger Lakes water quality. The funds are intended to help farmers manage stormwater runoff and associated pollution.
- The 2024 HABs reporting and notification season has ended. The New York Harmful Algal

Bloom System (NYHABS) link will be unavailable until the 2025 season begins in May.

Update:

NYSDEC's Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) 2024 Notification Season Summary (in their words):

During 2024, 218 waterbodies statewide were listed as "Confirmed HABs" on the NY HAB System (NYHABS). Over 2,100 HAB reports were submitted to DEC and confirmed by staff. The reports ranged from a single observation to widespread blooms that were persistent throughout the season. A summary of HABs reported during 2024 is available in the archive section of the [Harmful Algal Blooms webpage](#). Historical HABs data reported to the DEC dating back to 2012 is provided on [Open NY](#), which gives public access to digital data (Search the "Data NY" portal for "Harmful Algal Blooms"). One can view historical water quality monitoring data, including HABs information, at the Division of Water's [DOW Monitoring Portal](#). Both Open NY and the Monitoring Portal will be updated with 2024 HABs data over the coming months.

Land Holdings

Fillmore Nature Preserve Project Review:

- Fillmore Nature Preserve is a 161-acre property that is critical for protecting water quality in Owasco Lake, which provides drinking water to more than 70% of Cayuga County. A study by The Nature Conservancy ranked the property within the top 10 parcels in the Owasco Lake watershed with the greatest impact on water quality. The land includes diverse forests and approximately 40 acres of freshwater wetlands. It is located near the birthplace of President Millard Fillmore and Fillmore Glen State Park.
- The OLWMC closed on the property transfer from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) on January 10, 2023, and established the Fillmore Nature Preserve. Fillmore Nature Preserve property boundary signage was installed by OLWMC staff with the help of TNC on March 8, 2023. The associated field trip accommodated the first annual property inspection to meet the OLWMC's annual property inspection commitment.
- On May 22, 2023, student conservation work at the Fillmore Nature Preserve was one of the activities included as part of Moravia High School 'Moravia Gives Back Day.' Students collected litter along the roadway adjacent to the preserve, pulled invasive species, and identified species to inform a conservation database. Moravia High School students were the first to assess biodiversity at the preserve.
- \$9,117 was approved by the Fred L. Emerson Foundation for the OLWMC, specifically towards implementing the *Fillmore Nature Preserve- Conservation Education Kiosk, Access Lot, and Trail Network* project, as detailed in the OLWMC's project proposal dated September 14, 2023. The grant proposal was funded to create a public access lot and educational kiosk at the nature preserve.
 - The gravel lot provides public access to the land preserve for respectful use of its trails for hiking. The Towns of Moravia and Summerhill hauled gravel to build the public access lot. The Town of Owasco provided labor in-kind for creating the public access lot. The Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA) committed \$500 of compost and wildflower seed for the creation of a perennial pollinator wildflower garden adjacent to the lot; the event acted as an OLWMC/OWLA collaborative Lake Friendly Living public event that was held May 25, 2024. The kiosk will provide educational information about the land preserve concerning its purpose.

- The OLWMC applied for, and received, program support for the creation and posting of trails within the Fillmore Nature Preserve; a Cornell University program called Design Connect accepted a request for mapping and identifying trails. They offered two project managers who acted as primary project managers along with a team of 5-10 students.
 - Cornell’s Design Connect program team held a field trip at the Fillmore Nature Preserve on February 28, 2024 and again on March 16, 2024 to assess the conditions and locations of the existing trail network and gather information for mapping and marking trails. Their team conducted draft mock-ups of color schemes and themes of potential trail signage, and designed panels for the educational kiosk.
 - Cornell’s Design Connect worked with the OLWMC on trail map and educational kiosk panel revisions.
- The OLWMC responded to an offer for project support by the Partners for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) and proposed for a plant inventory, including for both terrestrial invasive and sensitive native species, at the Fillmore Nature Preserve. The proposal included a request for plant pictures and blurbs for inclusion on the educational kiosk that will be constructed there.
 - The Finger Lakes Partners for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) Crew Assistance Program (CAP) accepted the OLWMC proposal to work on a Fillmore Nature Preserve project this summer. From July 8-10, 2024 PRISM conducted the proposed 'species of interest' inventory at the Fillmore Nature Preserve, focusing on the identification of invasives species that exist there.
 - With the help of CC Planning for the submission of an additional application through PRISM, the OLWMC applied for a ‘boot brush station’ to be installed with the educational kiosk to support visitor education and efforts to reduce the spread of invasive species.
- PRISM ‘boot brush station’ signage was designed for inclusion adjacent to the educational kiosk.
- As recorded in the meeting minutes from its August 8, 2024 board meeting, the Town of Owasco formally committed to a mutual aid agreement for assisting with property maintenance, when available, at the preserve.
 - During the weeks of August 5, 2024 and August 12, 2024, Town and OLWMC staff collaborated on clearing trees from the trail networks there.
- On September 25, 2024, the perennial garden installed around the perimeter of the public access lot was overseeded to improve establishment and limit the competition of nuisance weeds. Preserve signage was also installed.
- Construction of the kiosk and boot brush station took place, starting October 15 and was completed on October 17, 2024.
- The grant final report was submitted on October 21, 2024.
- The grand opening was held November 7, 2024 with promotional support provided by CC Chamber of Commerce, CC Water Quality Management Agency (WQMA), and the Citizen Newspaper.

Fillmore Nature Preserve Project Update:

- On December 19, 2024 additional signage was installed to better inform visitors that the proposed boardwalk is not installed in the wetland area.
- According to feedback from the Emerson Foundation, their Grants Committee found the OLWMC's grant final report useful and welcome future grant applications.

Other Potential OLWMC Acquisitions Review:

- On June 14, 2023, the NYSDEC announced that New York State, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, permanently protected two environmentally sensitive parcels of open space in Cayuga County. A 203-acre addition to Fillmore Glen State Park in Moravia and 72 acres of forested wetlands in Venice were preserved. Both projects were funded through the State Department of Environmental Conservation's Water Quality Improvement Project program to protect the water quality in Owasco Lake Watershed.
- TNC has expressed interest in having the OLWMC own and steward two properties poised for preservation within the Owasco Lake watershed. TNC will present these acquisitions to the OLWMC Board for ownership and stewardship consideration. The acquisitions include:
 - 72-acre parcel in Venice, dense wetland
 - 100-acre parcel in Groton, mixed farmland

Additional Partner Land Acquisitions/Targets Review:

- Under 2023 Round 19 of the Water Quality Improvement Projects (WQIP) Grant, the Fingers Lakes Land Trust, Inc. (FLLT) received \$1,240,000 for Land Acquisition to Protect Owasco Lake. FLLT will work with landowners and partners in the Owasco Lake watershed to permanently protect approximately 500 acres through direct acquisition and the use of perpetual conservation easements. The program will focus on conservation and stewardship efforts to protect Owasco Lake. The proposed program grant will provide FLLT an opportunity to create a new nature preserve on the Sucker Brook wetland, one the largest remaining natural wetlands in the region and conserve additional lands throughout the Owasco Lake Watershed.

Additional Partner Land Acquisitions/Targets Update:

The FLLT offered to provide support to conserve the Camp Casowasco property. Depending on the owner's interests and goals, in partnership, the FLLT and OLWMC could help broker an easement or acquisition deal to help protect the parcel, and possibly, restore the building space.

Grant Projects and Funding

NFWF SOGL Project Review:

- A National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Sustain Our Great Lakes (SOGL) funding proposal was developed in partnership with CCSWCD and EA Engineering, targeting stream restoration along the Owasco Inlet. Proposed project partners also included the Cayuga County

Planning Department, the Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA), and SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Based on a successful pre-proposal the OLWMC submitted a full project proposal for Owasco Inlet streambank restoration project sites between Booth Hill Road and Cat Path Road in the Town of Locke. Landowners who reside along the targeted reaches have expressed concern about severe streambank erosion in those areas.

- Total Amount Requested: \$299,640.00
- Matching Contributions Proposed: \$100,360.00
- The OLWMC was awarded \$457,839.92 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Sustain Our Great Lakes (SOGL) program for the *Owasco Lake Watershed Critical Streams Restoration Project*.
- In February, 2024 CCSWCD delivered mailers to the landowners who have adjacent properties along our targeted reach of the Owasco Inlet, and CCSWCD gained early approvals for four out of five sites.
- EA Engineering and CCSWCD conducted a March 25, 2024 field trip to record baseline conditions, channel types, and to evaluate parcel access. CCSWCD and EA staff spoke with adjacent landowners and discussed survey needs for project modeling and design.
- EA Engineering held a field visit on April 9, 2024 (Task 2) when they collected site data, conducted a drone flyover, and identified plant/aquatic species as observed. The project team identified a laboratory to run project soil samples.
- EA Engineering, navigated the environmental permitting process and design, in preparation for project implementation during the 2025 field season. They completed drafts of the NEPA, ESA, and NHPA compliance forms and submitted them to the NFWF.
- EA Engineering developed a computer-aided design (CAD) model for the project. Additionally, they started utilizing a hydrologic model to estimate flow conditions that will inform their project designs. The one-dimensional model utilizes geometry and flow inputs (i.e., using historic USGS gauge data) and will output velocities and water surface elevations. This information is helping the engineering firm recommend materials and placements to the Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District (CCSWCD), which is contracted for project implementation.
- The project team met on August 9, 2024 to review preliminary design recommendations. EA Engineering screened the stabilization alternatives for Sites 1-6. Each site has stationed cross-sections where the channel velocities and shear stresses were calculated for the 2-year and 100-year flow events.
- Of the alternatives where the permissible shear stress/velocity is within an acceptable range, CCSWCD informed the designers of which bioengineering alternatives they would like EA Engineering to focus on incorporating into the design. In response, CCSWCD shared a variety of nature-based stabilization techniques that they recommend and are comfortable using for streambank stabilization projects.
- The project team received regulatory approvals from the US Fish and Wildlife Service to submit for project reimbursements and, ultimately, get underway with construction.
- An additional project update report was submitted, as required, to the NFWF on November 11, 2024.

NFWF SOGL Project Update:

- EA Engineering is developing the required NYSDEC and US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) project permit application package, which includes the Nationwide Permit 13, 27 and 401 water quality certifications.
- The existing conditions and 60% design set is complete and was submitted to CCSWCD and OLWMC staff in December of 2024 for review. Designers are adapting to site-specific constraints.
- EA Engineering is scheduled to engage with the OLWMC during its February 18, 2025 board meeting, concerning project designs.

The Nature Conservancy's 2025 Climate Resiliency Grant Program Update:

- Staff are considering an OLWMC grant application to support education expansion for the watershed municipalities regarding emergency response practices and advancing erosion and sediment controls for construction activities.
- The OLWMC applied for a Certificate of Good standing with the NYS Department of State, according to requirements for this grant request for proposals.

Relevant NYS Programming:

Newly Delineated Wetlands within the Owasco Lake Watershed

NYSDEC released the new wetland data on January 13, 2025. The regulations implement new statutory requirements under the State's Freshwater Wetlands Act that will safeguard an estimated one million additional acres of wetland habitat. There are 11,910.59 acres (18.6 sq miles) of new delineated wetlands within the Owasco Lake watershed. Combined with the pre-existing National Wetlands Inventory data, there are 13,261.22 acres (20.7 sq miles) of wetlands in the Owasco Lake watershed.

Proposed Ambient Water Quality Guidance Values for Phosphorus (in their words)

DEC Interim Commissioner Sean Mahar has announced the [release of draft water quality guidance values](#) to regulate phosphorus in New York State surface waters. Excess phosphorus can contribute to harmful algal blooms (HABs), lower dissolved oxygen levels, increased turbidity, and excessive growth of algae and aquatic plants. The draft guidance values are supplemented by draft updates to DEC's phosphorus permitting strategy and establish a process for prioritizing and reducing phosphorus loads from wastewater treatment plants.

Request for Immediate Rulemaking for On-site Treatment and Disposal of Landfill Leachate

A request letter was signed and delivered to Sean Mahar, Acting Commissioner, NYSDEC to urge the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to immediately initiate the rulemaking process to establish new regulations under 6 NYCRR Parts 360 & 363 regarding the effective management, treatment, and disposal of landfill leachate.

Municipal Funding Opportunities (In their words)

More Than \$16 Million – Largest Ever Awarded – in Climate Smart Communities Grant Awards

On December 23, 2024, DEC announced more than \$16 million in Climate Smart Communities Grant awards to municipalities across the state... The grant awards represent the largest ever awarded since the program was created thanks to funding from the Clean Water, Clean Air and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act. The funded projects will help New York advance the emission-reduction targets under the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (Climate Act) and support local projects to reduce pollution, decrease flood risk, improve infrastructure, and enhance climate resilience in communities.

List of 2024 Climate Smart Communities grant awards. More information on the grant program can be found on DEC's Grants For Climate Action webpage.

Reminder: Application Deadline for Zero-Emission Vehicle Infrastructure Grant Program (In their words)

*DEC's Municipal Zero-Emission Vehicle Infrastructure Grant program, which provides grants to cities, towns, villages and counties to install hydrogen fuel filling station components and direct current fast charge electric vehicle supply equipment for public use, is **accepting applications until 4 p.m. on February 28, 2025, through the Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) website.***

Find more information about the grant program for zero-emission vehicle infrastructure.

WQIP Award Citizen article excerpt by Robert Harding, December 24, 2024:

NYS awards \$1.2M for four Cayuga County water quality projects

A salt storage facility, shoreline stabilization and wetland restoration are among the Cayuga County projects that will be supported by more than \$1.2 million in funding through the state's regional economic development council initiative. The largest of the grants (\$600,000) was awarded to the town of Scipio for a new salt storage facility, which will replace the current structure that is leaking and undersized. According to the project's summary, the new salt storage building will protect groundwater near Salmon Creek, which is a Cayuga Lake tributary. The Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District will receive \$400,000 for a shoreline stabilization project in the towns of Aurelius and Springport. The project will reduce erosion and nutrient loading, while protecting 3,000 feet of shoreline in the two towns. Ducks Unlimited, a nonprofit organization that focuses on wetland conservation, will receive \$252,436 for a wetland restoration project in the Owasco Flats Wildlife Management Area near Moravia. The project aims to provide a habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife. It will also bolster flood mitigation in the area and improve water quality.

NYS Recognition and Relevant Bills

Project Review:

- NYS Senator Rachel May and Assemblymember Anna Kelles honored the Lake Friendly Living Coalition through the presentation of a NYS proclamation commemorating the Finger Lakes' Community Celebration of Lake Friendly Living in May, 2024.
- NYS Senator Rachel May and Assemblymember Anna Kelles provided an update on the status of legislative bills during the Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal meeting held the evening of November 20, 2024:

Finger Lakes Watershed Steward act (S7627/A8073): This bill will be redrafted to address the watershed rules and regulations issues for Owasco Lake Watershed.

PFAS disclosure act (S227/A3296): The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has determined that there exists no safe level of PFAS, and legislators are proceeding with legislation to require a clear and concise procedure for testing of PFAS in wastewater discharges. This will require operators with a SPDES permit to disclose measured PFAS levels with the public.

Harmful algal bloom monitoring and prevention act (S8356/A8867): This bill is under revision and awaiting multi-agency feedback

Finger Lakes Commission (S7628): Legislators are discontinuing this bill with plans to prepare more comprehensive language for inclusion under the 'watershed steward act.'

Protection for C streams (S1725/A4601): This bill has passed both houses over the last couple of years, only to be vetoed by the governor. Legislators are not pursuing this bill in the 2025 legislative session.

Project Update:

Reintroduced under the 2025 legislative session, under new print, NYS Senate bill S1833 Enacts the 'Harmful Algal Bloom Monitoring and Prevention Act.'

Municipality Buy-In

Project Review: The OLWMC continues to encourage participation and directorship from the remaining towns within the watershed that have yet to join to help direct project initiatives. They include the Towns of Venice, Sempronius, Groton, Genoa, and Skaneateles.

Prepared by Adam Effler, January 20, 2025